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TITHES: HISTORY AND USAGE.

Tithes: History and Usage.

A BIBLE STUDY.

BY

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Tithes: History and Usage.

FOR THERE IS VERILY A DISANNULLING OF THE COMMANDMENT GOING BEFORE FOR THE WEAKNESS AND UNPROFITABLENESS THEREOF,

FOR THE LAW MADE NOTHING PERFECT, BUT THE BRINGING IN OF A BETTER HOPE DID, BY THE WHICH WE DRAW NIGH UNTO GOD.

Hebrews, VII, 18 and 19.

The attempt which is being put forth to inoculate American protestantism with the doctrine and practice of "tithing", seems, unfortunately, to demand some little attention. False doctrines earnestly promulgated by good men are no doubt more dangerous to the general good than any other, since the masses of those who are seeking after the truth, are influenced fully as much by the character of the man who for the time being is their religious teacher, as by a careful analysis of the foundation upon which the doctrine really rests. The modern doc-

trine of tithing as put forth in this country has grown, and has at present some little standing, almost entirely on the acknowledged religious characters of those who teach it, rather than on anything that can be found in the bible in its support. If it were not for the fact that some really good men believe and teach it, this doctrine would not be worthy so much as a passing notice.

In order to a fair understanding of the subject, a careful analysis of the history of tithing, as it may be found by combining the facts to be obtained from both sacred and profane records, will be necessary.

The most ancient record touching on this point is found in the book of Genesis, and contains the account of the giving of tithes by Abraham to the priest Melchizedek, who came forth to bless him on his return from the discomfiture of the allied kings. This record, which is relied on as the starting point in the genealogy of tithing, has some points so dissimilar, as to raise the query as to whether the tithing there mentioned had any relation to what we now know as tith-

ing. Melchizedek did not wait for Abraham to come to him for priestly service, but himself went forth from his city taking with him bread and wine. As we know from profane history, it was the custom among the patriarchs to cement friendship with their neighbors, and especially with those whom they deemed to be powerful, by ceremonials and religious rites, so the king of Salem, having heard of the prowess of the Hebrew, thought to win his favor and esteem; and in connection with his present of bread and wine, volunteered a blessing. The patriarchs were priests by virtue of rank, and had charge of all the religious rites of their families. But Melchizedek was a worshipper, and hence a a priest of the Most High God. Whether the information furnished us in the epistle to the Hebrews was possessed by Abraham, we have no means of knowing; but it is safe to assert that his conduct on that occasion was not different from what was demanded by the customs of the time. It is stated that Abraham gave to Melchizedek "tithes of all." If the account had stopped with this

statement, we could not well avoid understanding it as saying that he gave to the king of Salem one tenth of the spoil which he had taken from the slaughtered kings. But we are informed that Abraham had sworn that he would not take even the least thing of the spoil for himself, and that every thing that he had taken was returned to his neighbors whom he had avenged, save only that which the soldiers had eaten. Of what then did he give tithes? or of what did he give one tenth? The answer to this question remains in obscurity: but from what knowledge we have of the customs then prevalent, he paid no real one tenth of anything, but simply gave his neighbor, in return for his politeness and the blessing which he invoked upon him, a very handsome present. It is proper to note at this point that whatever the amount of the gift to Melchizedek, it was a gift to him and not in any sense to the God whose blessing he had invoked. It was a personal gift to the priest, not to the Deity whom the priest represented.

The first unmistakable case of tithing

which the records furnish, is found in the vow which Jacob made at Bethel, on the morning after his wonderful dream, and the promises which were conveyed to him by means thereof. This vow will be found in Genesis XXVIII, 20–22. It is as follows: If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God; and this stone which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth to thee.

In this vow we have all the elements of a business arrangement. *If* the Lord will gratify his desires for earthly good, he in return will adopt God as his family deity, and will in addition give to Him one tenth of,—not the annual increase,—but one tenth of the whole of his gettings. There is here no promise of an annual tithing, a contribution of one tenth of his gross income to be paid over at stated periods, but simply that at some time he will give to God, *if* his

demand for bread to eat and raiment to wear is complied with, one tenth of his possessions. But this business proposition which Jacob seems to have regarded as entirely proper, would hardly be becoming in the case of one who professes the religion of Jesus Christ. It was simply the equivalent for saying that unless he was fed and clothed and brought again to his father's house in peace, he would find some other deity with whom he could make satisfactory arrangements. In pursuance of the plans which He had formulated for the instruction, enlightenment, and final redemption of the race, God saw fit to accept the challenge which Jacob then gave, and carried out all the conditions on His part; but whether Jacob ever carried out his part of the contract we are left to wonder. It would seem that if God had regarded the giving of the one tenth as of any real importance, we should have been furnished with a record of the fulfillment of this vow, with a detail of the rites, ceremonies and liturgies attendant thereat. In the absence of any record in this regard,

from what little knowledge we have of the Hebrew character at that time, it seems more than probable that Jacob entirely forgot, at the period of his prosperity, all about the vow which he had made, and never found it convenient to make the proper division of his estate, giving one tenth to the God who had made of him a great people.

Whether there is or was any connection between the vow which Jacob made as to the one tenth of his property, and the requirement in the Mosaic law that one tenth of the annual increase should be given to the Levites, is, as far as the scriptures are concerned, merely problematical. There may have or there may not have been the slightest connection. At the time of the giving of the law at Sinai, all the world was given to idolatry, and the Hebrews themselves were so little removed therefrom that during the absence of Moses upon the mount, they demanded of Aaron that he make gods to go before them. They had been witnesses of the wonders which had been done in the land of Egypt on their account, they knew full

well that all had been done in the name of the unseen God of their fathers, "the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth," they had witnessed their own marvelous escape from the Egyptian hosts, walking through the Red sea dry shod, but so gross were they, at so short a remove were they from the lower forms of barbaric life, that after a few days of absence on the part of Moses, they were ready to demand of Aaron some semblance of a God whom they could see and appreciate, "since as for this Moses, we wot not what has become of him." It was absolutely necessary that they should undergo a long and severe mental and moral training in order that they might finally be brought to a condition such that they could conceive the true character of the Jehovah who had taken them in hand for the purpose not only of making of them a peculiar people for himself, but also that he might fulfill the promises made to Abraham and Isaac that he would not only make of them a great people, but in them should all the nations of the earth be blessed.

At the time of the exodus, the nations of the world had to a very large extent advanced so far in wealth and refinement as that the religions which they professed were carried on with great splendor and elaborate rites. Each god and goddess had at their several shrines, large coteries of priests and persons assisting them in the sacrificial rites; many of the shrines were gorgeous temples, decked with gold and precious stones, fine linen and purple; rare spices and perfumes were in constant use, and no one might approach the shrine as a worshipper or to enquire into futurity, unless he brought thither gifts of value as well as the necessary beasts for the sacrifices. It was clearly understood that in order to appease the wrath of the gods or to secure aid or comfort therefrom, it was necessary to pay to the full extent of the ability of the suppliant therefor. The gifts were made ostensibly to the gods, but it was well known that in fact they were for the use and benefit of the shrine, i. e. of the priests. At some of the more popular shrines, vast wealth was accumulated, and

the priests became at times, the very arbiters of nations, plunging them into wars, decreeing destruction or prosperity at their caprice. The system of worship devised for the Hebrews under the Mosaic code, had reference to all these things. In order that they might have the less occasion to turn away to the worship of idols, the tabernacle, and finally the temple with the service thereat, was somewhat more splendid and elaborate than that of any of the idol shrines. And yet, lacking only the idol, the counterpart of nearly all the ceremonials of sacrifice can be found in the worship of Jupiter and his numerous progeny of lesser gods and goddesses. In the tabernacle and temple, the ark and the mercy seat above it took the place of the statue of the god at the idol shrine. This, and this alone, marked the difference between the worship of the Jehovah, in its outward forms, and that of the other notable gods. Instead of an image of the deity, Jehovah himself overshadowed the mercy seat with a cloud, which there remained the visible semblance of His power

and majesty; not to be viewed, indeed by any other than the high priest, but the people had the promise in the books of the law that as long as they remained faithful to His service, His visible presence should there appear.

For the carrying on of the elaborate system of ceremonial worship provided in the Mosaic code, with the dignity and splendor necessary to duly impress a people so gross as were the Hebrews, not a few people were necessary, and hence a whole tribe was detailed for these duties. The tribe of Levi having been set apart for the servital work of the ceremonial law, they were cut off from any landed inheritance among their brethren, but were given a few cities to live in, with the pasturage adjoining on which to feed their flocks. They were cut off from the agricultural pursuits of their nation, and were to live on the taxes levied on the other eleven tribes. The law provided that every citizen should contribute in kind, one tenth of his increase, annually to the Levites. This levy included every class of product of

the soil as well as of their herds. If this contribution, which was in reality a national tax for the support of a national religion, lacking only the power of enforcement, had been due and payable but once a year, the Levites would have been without adequate support; but the provision for the bringing in of first fruits was intended to furnish a steady and continuous supply of everything needed for the comfort of a Hebrew family. Out of the tithes received by the Levites, they were to take one tenth for the maintenance of the priests. It should be noted however, that the payment of this tax was accompanied with a religious ceremonial, as not otherwise could it be expected that a people fresh from bondage would pay a tax. The tithe was consequently made a "heave offering." This consisted in lifting up, near the great altar, the article; but under the wording of the law, the tithes were not offered *to* the Lord, but were commanded to be offered *before* the Lord. He had decreed that they should *belong* to the Levites as their property.

This then, without going into all the detail, was the tithing of the Mosaic code.

The whole Mosaic law was a system of justification by works,—the doing of something in return for which the divine blessing was to accrue. The people were in no mental or moral condition to appreciate spirituality in life or worship,—to understand that "God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth," and hence they were allowed to purchase immunity from the ills of wrong doing, by an elaborate and expensive system of gifts and offerings. To the system as devised, something analagous to tithes was an absolute necessity. The law itself gives but a faint glimpse of the elaborate ceremonials of the tabernacle and temple service; but from the writings of the Hebrew doctors, and a study of I Chronicles, XXIII–XXVI, we may obtain the facts necessary to an appreciation not only of the necessities of the worship, but of the great number of people required for its due and proper observance. That the payment of the

tithes was a necessity to the system, is shown by the fact that whenever the people fell away from their religion to such an extent that they failed to make these contributions, the Levites were obliged to turn elsewhere for their livelihood, and the service of the sanctuary was but feebly conducted. In other words, without the tithes, the system could not be carried on. The warnings and denunciations of the prophets for the failure to make payment of the tithes was the natural result of the failure of the celebration of the religious rites which could not be kept up without them. Unless the Levites were fairly supplied with the tithes, they did not perform the temple service, but turned otherwhere for the means of living. So it came about, not infrequently, that the Levites in not inconsiderable numbers, were engaged in the service of idol worship. Familiar as they were with all the forms, when the food supplies ran short and they were backslidden in heart, they became liberals in their religious notions, and served wherever their living was assured.

Not only were the tithes a necessity to the system of worship, but they were for a special purpose in connection with that system, and could not be lawfully diverted therefrom. The service of the Levites being a necessity to the system, their proper maintenance became also a necessity.

The payment of the tenth for the support of the Levites, did not by any means comprehend the sum of the required contributions to the service of the Lord. These were for the support of the service of a national sanctuary; the others were for the various forms of worship and the gifts to the poor. To the wealthy farmers, all these contributions came easily enough when their crops and herds were thriving, but for the man of limited means and business ability, after the payment of one tenth of his increase, there was a short allowance for the needs of his personal religion. One of the very natural results followed the system; the really pious, those who believed in the Jehovah and his word, and honestly tried to comply with the requirements of this law of works, sooner or

later found themselves among the poor, and became the servants in the houses of their wealthy neighbors.

After the return from the Babylonish captivity, the covenant which was made under the direction of Nehemiah provided that the tithes should be paid directly to the Levites, but the tenth of the tenths, which belonged to the priests, should be carried up to the temple, unto the Lord. The declaration of the law that one tenth of the increase of each year was holy to the Lord and was to be taken to the sanctuary for the Levites, was necessary as one of the elements for securing the proper payment. Among all the religions of ancient times, whatever was holy to the deity it was an extreme of profanation for the individual to use or even handle any more than was necessary for its conveyance to the shrine. The declaration of the law that one tenth of the increase should be holy to the Lord, in the conception of the times and the customs of all religions, took that increase out of the usable things, even if it was not contributed according to

the requirement. He who made use of aught that belonged to the tenth became, in his own eyes, a profanator, and thus liable to the especial vengeance of the offended deity for one of the most heinous of offenses. While there can be no doubt that severe penalties were inflicted upon the Hebrews for their laxity in the performance of this requirement, the degree of compliance therewith marked the ebb and flow of the religious condition of the nation as well as of the indivi-ual. Just in proportion to the desire after God and His favor was the desire for the worship of God in His appointed sanctuary; and as was the desire for the sanctuary worship, so was the willingness to bring tithes to the temple in order to promote that worship. He who seeks after God with a loving heart, spares not of his substance, if by any means he may honor God and aid his fellow man.

The prophets exhorted the people to bring in their tithes in order that their crops might be increased; but theirs was a religion of works. In their conception, in order to gain

the favor of God, they must first do something to merit His blessing. Unless they appeared at the temple with an offering, it was useless for them to pray, even. The prophets, indeed, taught the truths of a spiritual religion with the aid of the grandest of poetry and the loftiest of eastern imagery; but that it fell far short of its purpose and was construed only in material forms, is plainly evidenced by numerous passages of the gospels. To the Hebrews, the Jehovah they claimed as their national deity was little different from the other gods in the manner in which His favor was to be sought. As is no doubt true in every age and clime, there were a few, even in the darkest periods of the Hebrew history, who knew and had daily communion with the "Father of lights in whom is no variableness or shadow of turning;" but as compared with the whole people these were so sadly in the minority as to be hardly appreciated by the mass.

The law of Moses having become worn out as far as its efficacy in the salvation of men was concerned, and the world of man-

kind having arrived at a condition such that it could, if so disposed, come nearer to God and his truth than had theretofore been possible, a new revelation was made in aid of fallen man, "God sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh," and thus making it possible that the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus should make us free from the law of sin and death. This Christ declared that not one jot or tittle of the law should pass until all be fulfilled. The law to which he referred in that declaration, was certainly not the whole of the Mosaic code, with its endless round of ceremonials and offerings, nor even rules for the every day life of those who would seek thereby to gain the realms of the blessed; but rather the reference was made to the very essence of the law, which was contained in this, "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." The aim of God even from the beginning has been to make a way of escape possible for fallen men from the results of the fall and the miseries of their own sinful hearts; and while under the Mosaic code this was

possible of accomplishment, so enthralled had the people become by the idea that they were winning their salvation by the doing of good things and by refraining from the bad, that it became necessary to bring forward for sacrifice the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," the free gift of God himself in behalf of a ruined humanity. Having declared himself and his witnesses being assured, Christ paid the penalty of the accumulated sins of the world upon the cross. But ere his spirit departed the body, he declared, "It is finished." All the requirements of the law given amid the thunders of Sinai had been satisfied. And when he had declared "It is finished," "the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom." This rending of the veil not only admitted to the most holy place other than the priest, but marked the entire closing of the regime under which the temple service with its sacrifices, rites and ceremonials had constituted the central point in the religious life of God's chosen people. With the rending of the veil all

the efficacy of the priestly office and the Levitical service was at an end. Both had served their purpose in the plan of God for the redemption of the world, but by the sacrifice upon the cross an end was made of offerings for sin, and hence neither priest or Levite had any farther place in the economy of worship or service. By the declaration of Christ, also, the law of salvation by works was most pointedly repealed.

With the death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord, the law for the payment of tithes was abrogated. As before remarked, the tithes were a payment for a special purpose, and might not be diverted to any other. They were specifically declared to be the property of the Levites, save the tenth which they should contribute for the priests, and the law made special provision against their use for any other purpose. The incoming of a new regime under which the penalty for sin having been paid once for all by the sacrifice upon the cross, there was no Levitical service remaining for which the payment should be made, nor, indeed,

any Levites who might claim the tithes. Even if it be claimed that the law was not abrogated—pointedly repealed, by the declaration "It is finished," yet the law of tithing is abrogated by the fact that there are no Levites to whom the tithes can be paid. It will not do to imagine other than the one laid down in the law, to be the recipient of this service. To twist a law from its true intent is no better than to break it. If the authority of the law be still invoked for the payment of the tithes, the law must be followed in its strict letter, and the tenth of the increase must go to the Levites. If, indeed, under the law, provision had been made that under certain exigencies the tithes might be used for other of the temple services than the benefit of the Levites, there might be some leeway for those who claim that one-tenth of the increase should be paid into the coffers of "the church," to be used as "the church" may see fit. But there is no such opportunity given.

If it be still claimed that since the law of

tithes has not been repealed in terms, it should be remembered that from very ancient times the rule of law has been that a subsequent law which contravenes a prior one, repeals such of the provisions of the prior law as are in conflict. This rule obtained under the practice of the Medes and Persians, since in fact it was the only way in which their laws could be changed; and the Justinian code clearly recognizes the principle. In modern legislative practice a repealing act is only of value as a warning that a statute has been replaced by something different; the rule being that the act bearing the latest date of approval, takes precedence over others on the same subject of a prior date.

The religion of faith in the atonement of Christ being of a later date, repeals the law of the religion by works, by superseding it.

That the apostolic college regarded the clause of the law relative to tithing as obsolete, is evident to the careful student of the account given in the fifteenth of Acts, of the discussion and determination of the

relation of the law to the gentiles. When, after a full consideration of the subject as to how far the gentile converts should be bound by the Mosaic law, they wrote to them, "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden then these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication, from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well," they absolved them from every part of the law; the only requirements being that they should guard against any traces of sympathy with the worship of false gods, and lead moral lives. From the teachings of Christ as they had heard them, they were well indoctrinated into the creed of love to God and man, and this being well understood, there was little for the apostles to add. In his speech in opposition to those who desired to compel the gentiles to be circumcised and *keep the law*, Peter inquired with something of his wonted vehemence, "Now, therefore, why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck

of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" The insistence that the law of tithing holds good while the law of circumcision and the offering of slain beasts in propitiation for sin is done away, is unworthy of any one who believes in the gospel of Christ, or has any familiarity with the principles of jurisprudence.

So ingrained in the minds of the Jews was the belief that even under the reign of a Messiah all of the detail of the Levitical code must be carried out, that during the early stages of the Christian religion many of the believers at Jerusalem continued to comply with all the forms of the law, even going so far as to offer sacrifices on the temple altars, by the aid of the priesthood. Even Paul, himself, had but just finished a seven days of purification and the offering of beasts, when he was arrested, and from which arrest he was not thereafter free. The epistle to the Hebrews is a masterly argument in combat of the prevailing conception among the Jews. The writer of that book declares, chapter VII, 12, "For

the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law." The change of the law which abolished the Aaronic priesthood, abolished the offerings of slain beasts. The abolishment of the offerings for the various purposes of prayer and thanksgiving, abolished the Levitical temple service, and hence the tithes for the benefit of the Levites were also abolished.

Outside of Jerusalem, there seems to be no trace of any practice bordering on tithing, during the first four centuries of the Christian era, and when the traces do begin to appear, they are with the earmarks of the emboldened march of tyrannical ecclesiasticism. With the desire for power on the part of the clergy, came the demand for the means to build costly temples, the very existence of which necessitated, in the large cities, an increase of the assistant clergy, and the means to enable them to live in a manner comporting with their dignity, and finally the demand of the clergy that all contributions of the laity for every purpose should be placed in their hands, as

being better qualified to use them judiciously. Finally, in order to have a firm hold on as much of the property of the laity as possible, that they might live in the style of princes, and cope with the civil rulers to better advantage, about A. D. 350, the ecclesiastics began to teach and enjoin the doctrine in the local churches, but did not secure the full sanction therefor, until the second council of Tours, in A. D. 567.

Long before the doctrine of tithing had made any serious inroad in the Christian church, the ruling ecclesiastics had so far fallen from the simplicity of the gospel, the meekness of the Master, that when assembled in the great councils of the church, their actions and methods were worse than anything we can in this later day well conceive as possible among a body of men assembled for business purposes, without reference to the claims of the Christian religion. The condition of religion, morals and the general character of the councils of the early church may be best described in

the words of Dean Milman in his History of Latin Christianity. He says:

"It might have been supposed that nowhere would Christianity appear in such commanding majesty as in a council, which should gather from all quarters of the world the most eminent prelates and the most distinguished clergy; that a lofty and serene piety would govern all their proceedings, profound and dispassionate investigation exhaust every subject; human passions and interest would stand rebuked before that awful assembly; the sense of their own dignity as well as the desire of impressing their brethren with the solemnity and earnestness of their belief would at least exclude all intemperance of manner and language. Mutual awe and mutual emulation in Christian excellence would repress, even in the most violent, all unchristian violence. Their conclusions would be grave, mature, harmonious, for if not harmonious the confuted party would hardly acquiesce in the wisdom of their decrees; even their condemnations would be so tempered with

charity as gradually to win back the wanderer to the still open fold, rather than drive him, proscribed and branded, into inflexible and irreconcilable schism. History shows the melancholy reverse. Nowhere is Christianity less attractive, and, if we look to the ordinary tone and character of the proceedings, less authoritative, than in the councils of the church. It is in general a fierce collision of two rival factions, neither of which will yield, each of which is solemnly pledged against conviction. Intrigue, injustice, violence, decisions on authority alone, and that the authority of a turbulent majority, decisions by wild acclamation rather than after sober inquiry, detract from the reverence, and impugn the judgments, at least of the later councils. The close is almost invariably a terrible anathema, in which it is impossible not to discern the tones of human hatred, of arrogant triumph, of rejoicing at the damnation imprecated against the humiliated adversary. Even the venerable council of Nicea commenced with mutual accusals and

recriminations, which were suppressed by the moderation of the emperor; and throughout the account of Eusebius there is an adulation of the imperial convert, with something of the intoxication, it might be of pardonable vanity, at finding themselves the objects of royal favor, and partaking in royal banquets. But the more fatal error of that council was the solicitation, at least the acquiescence in the infliction of a civil penalty, that of exile, against the recusant prelates. The degeneracy is rapid from the council of Nicea to that of Ephesus, where each party came determined to use every means of haste, maneuver, court influence, bribery, to crush his adversary where there was an encouragement of, if not an appeal to the violence of the populace; to anticipate the decrees of the council; where each had his own tumultuous foreign rabble to back his quarrel; and neither would scruple at any means to obtain the ratification of their anathemas through persecution by the civil government. * * * Christianity, which

had so nobly asserted its independence of thought and faith in the face of heathen emperors, threw down that independence at the foot of the throne, in order that it might forcibly extirpate the remains of paganism, and compel an absolute uniformity of Christian faith."

The dogmatic utterances of councils made up and conducted as were those of the early church, as above described, can with but ill grace be held up as of any binding authority, among the protestants of these latter days.

Emboldened as they were by every new success in their grasp after power, temporal as well as spiritual, and seeing the need of strong retinues of retainers in order to overawe and overpower any incipient opposition, the bishops realized that in order to cope successfully with the civil power they must have large and corpulent treasuries at hand and devised the plan of re-enacting the worn out, cast off system of a compulsory tithing, as the bounden duty of all the faithful. From this there was but a step

to the enforcement of the civil law for the collection of tithes for the support of the state church, which became the rule under the reign of Charlemagne in the 9th century. The law thus established is the rule in all the countries of Europe, with the exception of France, which under the regime of the republic has been able to rid herself of this obnoxious statute. As practiced in England for the support of the established church, rich and poor, saint and sinner, churchman and dissenter alike must pay the rates, even to the taking of the last pig or cow, or the scant furniture from the humble dwelling. On the miseries of the poor of the sea girt isle, the lordly bishops revel in splendor, with incomes from the tithing rates which are ground with unrelentless hand from those who have not the slightest sympathy with the form of religion which takes the bread from their children's mouths for the glorification of men who but rarely preach the gospel to the poor, for whom Christ said that it was specially prepared, who evince little sympathy for the

oppressions which are weighing down their humble flocks, and which they are carrying out under the claim that it is in furtherance of the spread of the gospel of Christ among men. The crimes committed in the name of Christ and his gospel, during the centuries since the advent, make the heart sick at the recital.

Ecclesiasticism, which in America has heretofore been under restraint, is now again asserting its greed for power which can only be hoped for when the funds under control are such as to overbear opposition, and the doctrine is put forth that payments into the denominational coffers is a "giving to the Lord," with the farther declaration that since the Hebrews were commanded to bring one-tenth of their increase to the sanctuary, it is the duty of modern Christians to set apart one-tenth of their incomes and pay the same into the denominational treasury for the furtherance of the spread of the gospel, while the clerics devise the objects for which the funds shall be used in

such manner as to aggrandize their special denomination.

In the teachings of Christ, not one word can be found in support of the claim put forth, nor indeed, in the teachings of the epistles. While Christ made it very plain that our earthly substance belongs to God, His rule for its use is at a very great remove from any of our modern methods. Christ's church is not, nor ever was an organized body. Religious societies are no doubt a necessity to the building up of believers in their most holy faith and to the propagation of the truth; but the Christian has no right, under the plain teaching of the gospels, to turn over the sum total of his giving into the hands and judgment of any man or set of men. The only emphatic Christian giving, the only giving to the Lord recognized by our Lord, is giving to the poor; and it is doubtful if this can at all be done by proxy. As Christian men and women, it is no doubt our duty to share in our denominational enterprises, to give according to our means to the distribution

of the bible, the aid of home and foreign missions, and for the work of the society to which we belong; but it is our especial duty to hold ourselves ready at all times to distribute to the poor with no stingy hand. Christ has assured us of His special favor for this class of giving; for any other, He has made us no promises.

It is now proper to claim that tithing is not only not in any way enjoined in the scriptures, but it is contrary to the spirit of the new dispensation. Tithing, under the Mosaic code, was an inseparable part of the system of salvation by works, and the sacrifices on the altar. The sacrifice of Christ upon the cross forever closed the making of offerings for sin, and at the same time closed the duties of the Levitical service. The tithes were not divertible to any other purpose; unless given to the Levites, they cannot be recognized at all as a gift to God. Neither, indeed, can they be so recognized, unless offered in the sanctuary as a heave offering. The law itself allowed no substitutions for its forms and ceremonies. With

the close of the Aaronic priesthood, the Levitical service was forever closed as well. Tithing, as taught, is in furtherance of ecclesiasticism, which in all ages has been one of the chief elements which have made for unrighteousness and has hindered the spread of personal piety among the people. Christ's teachings not only ignore it as a duty of his followers, but the giving which He enjoined is incompatible therewith. It is an attempted resuscitation of the wrangles of the early church for and against conformity to the law in order to salvation. As is tritely said in one of the best and latest of the cyclopedias, "Tithes * * * are no part of New Testament legislation." If this be true they should have no place in the life of the followers of Christ.

There is one other and important consideration which should not be overlooked. The command to the Hebrews that they bring one-tenth of their annual increase unto the sanctuary, was coupled with the promise that while they were obedient to

this command their crops and herds should not fail to produce bountifully; and it seems impossible for the human mind to dissociate the promise of good to accrue to the giver, as a result of the giving. It matters not how honestly one may try to do so, any *system* of giving must take the form of buying or earning from God the earthly good we crave. But the Christian rule appears to be "do good and lend, hoping for nothing again." The moment the resolution is formed for the following out a systematic method of giving, just that moment the individual attempts to form a contract with his Maker similar to the one made by Jacob, when he vowed that, "*If* God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God;" the exact equivalent to saying that if the conditions are not complied with, the Lord should not be his God.

He who believes in the life, death on the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and

who hopes through the merit of His sacrifice to be saved from his sins and made a partaker of an endless life, certainly has no right to make bargains with the Lord relative to any earthly good, since we are assured on the word of Christ himself, that Our Father watches over and cares for our every need. The very essence of the rule of Christian giving is contained in the words of Christ, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

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